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Secretary Clinton Heads U.S. Delegation for Talks in Mexico City

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton leads a delegation of senior government officials for talks with Mexico March 23 on a range of security issues that includes good governance and cooperative efforts against illegal drug trafficking.

"We expect a fruitful dialogue on the very, very intense cooperation that the United States has in addressing the problems that are common problems to both of our countries," Assistant Secretary of State Arturo Valenzuela said at a Washington Foreign Press Center briefing March 19.

This is the second formal meeting of the Mérida U.S.-Mexico High Level Consultative Group and has been in preparation for several months; the first was held in Washington in December 2008.

Clinton and Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa will lead the discussions on the Mérida Initiative, which focuses on enhanced efforts to break the power of drug trafficking cartels; strengthening the rule of law, democratic institutions and respect for human rights; creating a 21st century border; and building strong communities, the State Department said in announcing the trip.

Accompanying Clinton on the trip to Mexico City will be Defense Secretary Robert Gates; Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano; Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair; John Brennan, a presidential adviser for homeland security and counterterrorism; Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for Immigration and Customs Enforcement John Morton; acting Deputy Attorney General Gary Grindler; Adam Szubin, director of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control; Patrick Ward, acting deputy director of supply reduction in the Office of National Drug Control Policy; and acting Administrator Michele Leonhart of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

The meeting comes just weeks after an American employee of the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, was killed along with her husband, and the husband of a Mexican employee was also killed as they returned home from a social event.

"The tragic events in Juarez are just a reminder of the challenges that both countries face," Valenzuela said. "But Juarez is not the only place where there's a serious

problem. You know, there's a problem throughout the northern part of Mexico and on through the border areas."

The Mérida Initiative was launched by then-President George W. Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderón in October 2007 as a three-year program, but it has been shifting to a continuous program between the two governments. The program focuses on combating drug trafficking, gangs and organized crime, and at delivering training and equipment to counternarcotics teams and other law enforcement officers, as well as technical assistance to help strengthen the court system, in Mexico and other partner countries in Central America and the Caribbean.

Drug trafficking and criminal organizations in the region have grown in size and strength over the last decade, fueled by the northward flow of illegal drugs and the southward flow of money and weapons. U.S. officials say an enhanced initiative would bring resources and expertise from across the U.S. government and focus them on strengthening efforts to close the pipeline in both directions.

Mideast Peace Requires "Difficult but Necessary Choices"

By Stephen Kaufman, Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told supporters of Israel that the status quo in the Middle East is unsustainable and threatens Israel's long-term future, urging the Jewish state to pursue a two-state solution with the Palestinians based on its 1967 borders with agreed land swaps.

Speaking at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) policy conference in Washington March 22, Clinton said all parties to the conflict will need to make "difficult but necessary choices" to create a future where Israelis and Palestinians can "grow up free from fear and to have that same opportunity to live up to their full God-given potential."

As Israeli and other officials have observed, demographic trends "are hastening the hour at which Israelis may have to choose between preserving their democracy and staying true to the dream of a Jewish homeland," she said. "Given this reality, a two-state solution is the only viable path for Israel to remain both a democracy and a Jewish state."

The secretary also noted a struggle "between those in the region who accept peace and coexistence with Israel and those who reject it and seek only continued violence." The status quo promises more violence and strengthens the rejectionists, who have argued that peace is

impossible. Instead, "those willing to negotiate need to be able to show results for their efforts, and those who preach violence must be proven wrong," she said.

Peace negotiations must be "built on a foundation of mutual trust and confidence," Clinton said, and for that reason both Israel and the Palestinians need to refrain from statements and actions that "undermine the process or prejudice the outcome of talks."

The Obama administration's March 9 condemnation of Israel's building plans in East Jerusalem was neither "about wounded pride" nor a U.S. "judgment on the final status" of the holy city, she said. "This is about getting to the table, creating and protecting an atmosphere of trust around it, and staying there until the job is finally done."

Along with undermining mutual trust between Israel and the Palestinians and endangering proximity talks that have recently been announced, Israeli settlement activity also "undermines America's unique ability to play ... an essential role" in helping to end the conflict.

"Our credibility in this process depends in part on our willingness to praise both sides when they are courageous, and, when we don't agree, to say so and say so unequivocally," Clinton said.

Clinton also condemned a Palestinian municipality's decision to rename a public square after a terrorist who had killed Israeli civilians. She also condemned instigators who "deliberately mischaracterized" the rededication of a Jewish synagogue in Jerusalem to foment incitement and unrest.

The proximity talks are meant to "prepare the ground" for the resumption of direct negotiations between the two sides, she said. They "are a hopeful first step, and they should be serious and substantive," but ultimately there will need to be direct negotiations to work through the issues and reach an agreement to end the conflict.

"The United States knows we cannot force a solution, we cannot ordain or command the outcome. The parties themselves must resolve their differences. But we believe that through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree to an outcome which ends the conflict," she said, pledging U.S. readiness to "play an active and sustained role in these talks and to support the parties."

The end of the decadeslong conflict offers "a future of promise and possibility" for both sides, Clinton said, with the freedom to travel and trade freely in the region, increased personal security, self-determination and mutual cooperation "on issues of common concern, like water, infrastructure and development, that build broadly shared prosperity."

Dwindling Water Rises to Top U.S. Priority

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Increased population growth and the effects of climate change will cause nearly two-thirds of the world's population to be living under water-stress conditions by the year 2025, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton warns, and she says the United States is elevating the issue of water scarcity in its foreign policy not only to encourage more efficient use, but also to minimize future political conflicts as resources become more scarce.

Clinton spoke at the National Geographic Society in Washington March 22 on the occasion of World Water Day, first designated by the United Nations in 1992 to raise annual awareness of the growing water crisis.

"Water challenges are most obvious in developing nations, but they affect every country on Earth and they transcend political boundaries," Clinton said. "As water becomes increasingly scarce it may become a potential catalyst for conflict among and within countries."

Along with seeing most of the world's people living under water-stress conditions, in 15 years, 2.4 billion people will face "absolute water scarcity," which is "the point at which a lack of water threatens social and economic development," Clinton said.

When there is not enough water to provide for sanitation or irrigation, the results can range from economic decline to unrest and instability, she said.

Rather than focus merely on geopolitical boundaries, the secretary advised looking at regions in terms of watersheds, river basins and aquifers, noting that more than 260 river basins around the world are shared between two or more countries.

"We cannot address the water challenges of these countries in isolation. We should use every regional watershed or aquifer as an opportunity for stronger international cooperation. Done right, there could be huge political and economic benefits from regional water diplomacy," Clinton said.

Although there is no "technological silver bullet" that currently exists to solve water scarcity, Clinton said current innovations can offer improvements in areas such as disinfecting and storing drinking water, the treatment of wastewater and desalinization. "We need to work harder to share this knowledge with the rest of the world," she said.

"It is my hope that by making water a front-burner issue,

a high priority in our national and international dialogues, we can give our children and our children's children the future they deserve," Clinton said.

In remarks at the State Department March 22, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero summarized the overall message of Clinton's speech, saying, "We want to ensure that no person dies from a preventable water-related disease and that water doesn't become an impediment to socioeconomic development or a threat to peace and security."

The Obama administration is integrating the issue of water into its foreign policy priorities, as well as elevating it as "a stand-alone priority," Otero said.

Where there is an existing scarcity, "we already see countries trying to reach agreement and in some cases expressing considerable tension between them. This is precisely the issue that we want to be able to help," Otero said.

"We want to be able to create the increased capacity among countries to be able to dialogue with each other, to be able to reach agreement in those rivers that they share and to be able to plan long term, into the next decade and the following decade, in the way in which they're going to use their sources of existing water and the way in which they're going to share the water that they have," she said.

Michael Yates of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said USAID now spends an average of \$500 million every year in water projects that benefit 70 countries around the world.

He said in 2008, USAID was able to provide 6 million people around the world with improved access to water. For 4 million of them it was their "first-time access to improved water."

Yates said USAID helped 7 million people access sanitation in 2008, more than 2 million of whom were obtaining their first access to improved sanitation services.

China Reopens Its Market to U.S. Pork Products

U.S. officials praise China's reliance on scientific standards

Washington — China has agreed to reopen its market to U.S. pork and pork products, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk announced March 18.

"When I traveled to China with U.S. Trade Representative Kirk in October, our discussions with Chinese officials laid the groundwork for reopening this market," Vilsack said. "This resolution is excellent news for American hog

producers."

Saying he was "pleased that China affirmed in our meetings that they will base their decisions on international science-based guidelines," Kirk added the United States looks forward "to working cooperatively to resolve additional issues, including a resumption of trade in beef."

In 2009, the United States exported 20 percent of its total pork production. Prior to trade constraints arising from the H1N1 flu virus, exports of U.S. pork and pork variety meat to China were valued at nearly \$275 million in 2008. China was the United States' seventh-largest market, accounting for 6 percent of U.S. pork and pork variety meat exports.

On March 17, the Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China accepted the U.S. proposal to resume exports of U.S. pork, following meetings between Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services James Miller, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Agricultural Affairs Jim Murphy and Chinese officials in Beijing. Pork trade is scheduled to resume as soon as both sides agree on the final language for export documentation.

In October 2009, Vilsack, Kirk and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke participated in the meeting of the U.S.-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade in Hangzhou, China, at which China agreed to remove its ban on pork products. Since that time, the United States and China have worked to implement this commitment.

That trip followed a September 2009 meeting in Washington at which Vilsack discussed a wide range of agricultural issues with China's minister of agriculture, Sun Zhengcai. They concluded their talks by renewing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on bilateral cooperation in scientific research and agricultural trade. The original MOU, signed in August 2003, established the Joint Committee on Cooperation in Agriculture, which meets at least once every two years, alternately in the United States and China.

The United States has stressed the need for China to remove all restrictions on trade in pork products related to the H1N1 virus, given clear guidance from international bodies including the World Organisation for Animal Health, World Health Organization and U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization that there is no risk to humans from consuming properly prepared pork and pork products.

In the spring of 2009, the outbreak of H1N1 influenza, also known as swine flu, prompted more than a dozen countries to impose trade restrictions on pork products

despite the lack of any scientific basis for the bans and despite a joint statement by the international organizations asserting pork products handled in accordance with hygienic practices are not a source of H1N1 infection.

At that time, Kirk said the joint statement validated the safety of U.S. pork and told the world market that restricting U.S. pork or any meat products because of the outbreak is without scientific justification.

Vilsack also addressed the issue in April 2009, saying, "While there is no evidence at this time that swine has been infected with this virus, the science is clear that consuming or handling pork, consistent with safe handling practices, is of no risk to consumers." His statement echoed findings by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Another concern for U.S. meat producers — and one with a similar lack of scientific justification — has been closure of markets, particularly those in Asia, to U.S. beef products over fears of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), also known as mad cow disease.

Recurring closures and restrictions, triggered by the 2003 discovery of a BSE-positive cow imported into the United States from Canada, dropped total U.S. beef exports from \$4 billion in 2003 to \$808 million in 2004.

Steady Progress Against Somali Piracy

Successful pirate attacks have declined, official says
By Charles W. Corey, Staff Writer

Washington — With the cooperation of the international shipping industry, there has been steady progress in the fight against maritime piracy off the east coast of Africa, a senior U.S. official told reporters March 19.

Thomas Countryman, principal deputy assistant secretary of state in the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, made that point while briefing reporters at the Foreign Press Center in Washington. He was joined by Donald Yamamoto, the principal assistant secretary of state in the department's Bureau of African Affairs.

Countryman said the progress in fighting piracy has been "steady" but not dramatic and that there has been a decline in the number of successful pirate attacks in the region.

He explained that progress has been achieved on a number of fronts. In the military area, he said, "more than 20 nations have contributed to maintaining an international naval force in the Gulf of Aden. On any given day there is an average of about 17 naval ships on patrol in the Gulf of Aden. They have created an

internationally recognized transit corridor that provides security for about 30,000 cargo ships that transit that corridor every year."

What is most impressive, he said, is that "we have melded U.S., European Union, NATO and a number of ships from other countries, including from Russia, China, South Korea and Japan, that work together not under a unified international command but with a shared awareness and deconfliction system that allows the ships from different countries to work together."

He called this effort, in which many different countries participate with only a coordination mechanism instead of a command mechanism, "fairly unprecedented."

A second important area of cooperation and progress, he said, is with the shipping industry itself. "The lowest-cost and most effective measures that can be taken to deter and defeat piracy depend upon the vessels themselves," as maritime crews adopt relatively low-cost security measures.

Piracy has been a threat to U.S. food assistance in the region, and Countryman said U.S.-flagged vessels are now required to employ certain practices when they are performing the very important mission of delivering U.S. food assistance to the Horn of Africa. "We think it has worked well" and resulted in a decline in successful pirate attacks, he added.

Third, Countryman cited some progress in the prosecution of pirates, calling piracy a universal crime. "Every state has both the right and the obligation to prosecute pirates," he reminded reporters.

He said the United States encourages all states that have been affected by piracy to prosecute pirates. He cited Kenya as an example. Kenya's prosecutions will yield more economic and humanitarian benefits for the region than if the pirates were prosecuted elsewhere, he said.

Responding to Kenya's actions, he said, the United States, the European Union and other donors are helping the government of Kenya develop its legal system in a way that will serve Kenyans in the future. "We hope also to see other countries in the broader region perform the same kind of responsible service by undertaking the prosecution of suspected pirates," he said.

Fourth, Countryman said, a working group has been established to provide public information to the people of Somalia, to help them realize that piracy is not the answer to their difficult political and economic situation.

Providing some background on the situation, Countryman said in January 2009, some 24 countries

formed the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia under the umbrella of the United Nations. The group now includes 47 countries and 10 international organizations. What binds everyone together, he said, is the realization that piracy off the coast of Somalia results from the disorder that has characterized the state of Somalia over the past 20 years and that to completely address the problem, "we have to work to re-stabilize Somalia."

Yamamoto said the United States and the international community are trying to help by working with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the people of Somalia to help them realize their long-term aspirations. For that, he said, "we need to work closer together" with civil society and grass-roots groups.

Asked to describe the psychological profile of a typical Somali pirate, Countryman said no such profile has been established. What is most important, he said, is to distinguish between the young men who go to sea to commit piracy and the crime bosses who make most of the money from piracy.

"It is not hard in a place like Somalia," where there is high unemployment and a lack of economic opportunity, "to find young men who are willing to risk their lives in an unfamiliar environment — the sea — in an unfamiliar enterprise — hostage taking for ransom — and who face the risk of violence or being apprehended and put in jail."

To the crime boss, the young man sent out to hijack a ship is just as disposable as the small boat he is sent out in and the small arms he is carrying, Countryman said. "The primary profits go back to the individual who has financed the venture. Some of it trickles into the Somali economy. We believe that much more of it floods out of the Somali economy," to be kept safe elsewhere, without any benefit to the Somali people.

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